

A Deposit *Guaranteeing Our Inheritance*

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Three Uses In the New Testament	1
“Guaranteeing Our Inheritance” is NOT In the Original Greek	2
Original Text is God-Breathed - Inspired by the Holy Spirit.....	2
The Literal Translation of Those Verses	2
Holy Spirit’s Presence and Sealing Explained	3
“Earnest” and “Deposit” Compared	3
“Earnest” Examined.....	3
A Token Of What Is To Come	3
Something of Value to Bind a Bargain	4
Application of Earnest Money Rules to Salvation.....	5
Examples of Failures to Keep Our Bargain With God.....	5
Perseverance	6
Obedience	8
All the Other Conditions Of a Saving Faith	9
When Does God Demand Return Of His Earnest - the Holy Spirit?	9
Conclusion.....	10

Introduction

The title phrase, “a deposit, guaranteeing our inheritance,” is a phrase relied upon by those seeking assurance of their salvation. It is frequently offered as a proof of the doctrine of eternal security.

Because of its use, and because of the doctrine for which it is offered as proof, it is important to determine if the phrase is correctly quoted and if it means what its proponents claim that it means. If it is incorrectly quoted, or if the phrase does not mean what it says, it could cut the ground from under those making false claims for false doctrines.

Three Uses In the New Testament

Three times the phrase is used in the NIV version of the New Testament. Let’s look at the entire verses to give the immediate context:

He anointed us, ²² set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come (2 Cor. 1:22).

⁵ Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come (2 Cor. 5:5).

Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:14).

All three instances in the NIV speak of the Holy Spirit put in our hearts or given us or the promised one who is a deposit guaranteeing what is to come or our inheritance..

“Guaranteeing Our Inheritance” is NOT In the Original Greek

In each case, as we can see, the phrase “guaranteeing what is to come” or “guaranteeing our inheritance” explains the purpose of the deposit. It is important to our understanding of the phrase, as it gives us the understanding of deposit.

But suppose neither of those phrases are in the original text? They are NOT! The translators decided to add the phrase, apparently believing that was what the “meaning” of the text *should be*. As a result, countless people have relied on these texts, believing that was what Scripture says, while in fact it says something quite different, with quite a different meaning, as we shall see.

What is particularly amazing to me is that Ephesians 1:14 has no note whatsoever so say that “guaranteeing our inheritance” was added and is not part of the original text. My NIV study Bible does say so with respect to 2 Cor. 1:22. As to 2 Cor. 5:5, it only refers to the note on 1:22 as to the term deposit, without reference to the addition of “guaranteeing our inheritance.

Original Text is God-Breathed – Inspired by the Holy Spirit

The Preface to the Revised Edition of Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible (YLT) speaks to the kind of issue we face here:

The following Translation of the New Testament is based upon the belief that every word of the original is “God-breathed,” as the Apostle Paul says in his Second Epistle to Timothy, chapter 3.16. . . . This inspiration extends only to the original text, *as it came from the pens of the writers*, not to any translations ever made by man, however aged, venerable, or good; and only in so far as any of these adhere to the original – neither adding to nor omitting from it one particle – are they of any *real value*, for, to the extent that they vary from the original, the doctrine of verbal inspiration is lost, so far as that version is concerned.

Here we have a case of a whole phrase being added by the translators.

The Literal Translation of Those Verses

. . . and He who is confirming you with us into Christ, and did anoint us, is God, who also sealed us, and gave the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts (2 Cor. 1:21-22, YLT).

And He who did work us to this self-same thing is God, who also did give to us the earnest of the Spirit; (2 Cor. 5:5, YLT).

. . . in whom also having believed, ye were sealed, with the Holy Spirit of the promise, which is an earnest of our inheritance, to the redemption of the acquired possession, to the praise of His glory (Ephesians 1:13-14, YLT).

Something else becomes obvious. The word “deposit” is nowhere to be found. There was another substitution of words by the translators. The original said it was the “earnest,” not a deposit.

We didn’t have to go as far as Young’s Literal Translation of the Bible to determine this. The King James Version says the same thing.

Holy Spirit’s Presence and Sealing Explained

People have speculated on what sealing means. It is explained in the text. In the literal translation we find the explanation of the sealing of the Holy Spirit. It is “an earnest of our inheritance.” Is that the same thing as a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance? Let’s compare deposit and earnest.

“Earnest” and “Deposit” Compared

What is “an earnest”? A 1976 edition of Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary gives us an idea of what that means:

1. something of value given by a buyer to a seller to bind a bargain. 2. a token of what is to come.

A deposit is defined as:

2. something placed for safekeeping: as a: money deposited in a bank b: money given as a pledge or down payment 3: a place of deposit 4: an act of depositing

Did you notice something missing? Neither definition has the word “guarantee” associated with it as part of its meaning, yet that is an integral part of the phrase inserted by the translators.

Further, the definitions have only one meaning in common – a down payment (or something of value) given as a down payment (or to bind a bargain). The word deposit misses altogether the significant meaning of “earnest” as “a token of what is to come.”

“Earnest” Examined

Let’s examine each of the two meanings possible in these scriptures.

A Token Of What Is To Come

Token means (1) an outward sign or expression, (2) a symbol (as a white flag is a token of surrender), (3) a distinguishing feature, (4) (a) souvenir or keepsake, (b) a small part

representing the whole (this is only a token of what he hopes to accomplish), (c) something given or shown as a guarantee (as of authority, right, or identity).

From that definition, we have these possible meanings: an outward sign or expression of what is to come, a symbol of what is to come, a distinguishing feature of what is to come, or a small part representing the whole of what is to come. Though 4(c) uses the word guarantee, it has no application here as it is not the guarantee in the definition is not of what is to come, but rather the guarantee of the authority, right, or identity is of whoever gave the token.

In the verses, the earnest is the Holy Spirit. Consider Ephesians 1:14,

“sealed, with the Holy Spirit of the promise, which is an earnest of our inheritance, to the redemption of the acquired possession” (YLT).

Using the definition of token as “a small part representing the whole,” consider this rephrasing: “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is a token of our inheritance, to [until?] the redemption of the acquired possession.” This is a possible and reasonable interpretation. When we are sealed with the Holy Spirit we then receive the fruit of the Holy Spirit -- love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Surely those manifestations of the Spirit are a token – a small part representing the whole (of the quality of life we will have for all eternity with Christ Jesus our Lord). According to this meaning of token, we are given a token – a small portion of like kind – of the characteristics of our inheritance in the kingdom of God.

But when we consider 2 Cor 1:22 and 5:5, we see slightly different language:

“gave the earnest of the Spirit” and “did give to us the earnest of the Spirit”

Here we see that the token is of the Spirit. Is this still a small part representing the whole, as in the prior discussion? It could well be the same. When the believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we know he does not have all of the Holy Spirit within him. The Holy Spirit is everywhere, indwelling all believers. It could well mean that we have the token (a small part [of the Holy Spirit] representing the whole).

Significantly, neither application of the definition, nor others which could be considered but seem far less applicable, guarantee anything. Rather they both represent the result or the presence of God in the life of the believer.

Something of Value to Bind a Bargain

Let's look next at a common meaning of both earnest and deposit – something of value to bind a transaction. It is common to call money given by one person to another to bind a transaction “earnest money.” It is good faith money, given to show serious intent to complete the transaction.

Is there any guarantee associated with earnest money? As an attorney, I know of none. In commercial transactions, the contract generally provides that if the party who paid the earnest money defaults, he will lose the earnest money. That is why it is called earnest money. The

person has to be in earnest because he knows he will lose the earnest money paid if he fails to complete his part of the transaction.

Earnest money has no way, in itself, of guaranteeing a transaction. The ability of the person who paid the earnest money to complete the transaction may change such that he cannot fulfill the agreement. He may simply change his mind and be willing to forfeit the earnest money rather than complete the transaction.

There is also a way in which the earnest money could be returned to the buyer (who paid the earnest money). If it is later determined that the agreement was made fraudulently – due to the fraud of the person receiving the earnest money, then the earnest money can be ordered returned and the agreement voided. If the recipient of the earnest money fails to complete his end of the bargain, then also the earnest money must be returned.

There is NO GUARANTEE associated with either earnest money or a deposit. Both are either forfeitable or returnable, depending on the circumstances.

Application of Earnest Money Rules to Salvation

This discussion began about those people who have mistakenly used the above verses to argue that salvation, once had – once the Holy Spirit was given as a deposit – is guaranteed and cannot be lost.

We have seen that the normal usage of both earnest money and deposit have no application with a “guarantee,” but instead allows for both return and forfeiture of the earnest money. And that is the message of Scripture both by its teaching and examples given.

One of the rules we saw above is that if the person receiving the earnest money fails to complete his part of the bargain, the deposit (earnest money) is refundable. If God sees that you or I fail to keep our part of the bargain, he has every right to demand (and take back) his earnest of the Holy Spirit.

Examples of Failures to Keep Our Bargain With God

Let’s look at some of these parts of the bargain with God that a person may fail to keep. If you don’t realize there is a bargain that takes place, you will have difficulty understanding this explanation.

The bargain is simple. God says, “If you believe (and continue to believe) in my Son, I will give you eternal life.” (John 3:16).

The response of those who will be saved is, “Yes, Father, I do believe in your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and I will continue to believe in him.”

At the point, there may be many who cry “Heresy!” How can I say that we make a bargain with God about salvation? They may say, salvation is all about grace! But they are wrong! Salvation is possible because of God’s grace – Jesus’ atoning death on the cross means we can be justified before God – forgiven our sins and counted blameless and free from accusation (Colossians 1:21-22), but it is enabled by our faith. I define a saving faith as:

A saving faith is faith in Christ Jesus as our LORD, which is proved by our obedience to his teachings and commands, by the evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, and by doing those works God prepared in advance for us to do.

Scripture requires those who would be saved to receive Jesus as their Lord (see Romans 10:9-10, 13, 14:9; Acts 16:31, Acts 20:21; 2 Corinthians 4:5; 1 Peter 3:15; Colossians 2:6-7; Acts 10:36, 5:14, 9:42, 11:21, 16:15, 18:8). **Obedience to Jesus' teachings and commands is the natural and necessary evidence of our love for Jesus as we receive him as our Lord** (see Matthew 7:21, Romans 1:5, 16:26, 1 John 5:3, Luke 6:46, John 14:15, 21, 23, Hebrews 5:9, and Matthew 28:20).¹

If Jesus is no longer our Lord, if we take over control of our own lives and rebel against him, we have breached the primary condition of our bargain with God. His bargain of salvation is only for those who continue to live with Jesus as their Lord.

Let's look at other potential breaches of our bargain with God:

Perseverance

Jesus, warning about the conditions at the end of the age, said:

¹² "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, ¹³ but he who stands firm to the end will be saved" (Matthew 24:12-13).

What will happen to the person who doesn't stand firm to the end? By implication, he will not be saved. There are other teachings that say the same thing:

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain (1 Corinthians 15:1-2).

Paul's warning is clear and unambiguous. These are people who received his gospel. They took their stand on it. And they will be saved by it IF they hold firmly to what he preached to them. Paul warns – not by implication but by direct statement – warns they will be lost if they do not hold firmly to the word he preached to them.

Lest we think this was a one-time warning, Paul also warned the Colossians:

²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— ²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant (Colossians 1:21-23).

¹ For a more complete discussion of what constitutes a saving faith, visit the website: www.bereanpublishers.co.nz, Book: Saving Faith, and Salvation Issues/Listening In.

Paul recites to the Colossians the glorious gospel and grace of God. God reconciled us by Christ physical body through death. His purpose was to present us holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation! Hallelujah! But that is qualified and true ONLY if we continue in our faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.

Was this also just an aberration on Paul's part, something he threw out which really did not represent his thinking and theology? Just the opposite! He said that gospel is what the Colossians heard (likely from him) and of which he had become a servant. It was his gospel, his theology, and his beautiful summary of the gospel.

The writer to the Hebrews says something similar as he warns his readers:

³⁶ You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. ³⁷ For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. ³⁸ But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." ³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved (Hebrews 10:36-39).

The writer is speaking to believers. He warns they must persevere so they will receive what God has promised those who persevere – his salvation. Then he talks about those who don't persevere, those who shrink back. He tells us what will happen to them – they are destroyed!

Peter also spoke to the issue of perseverance and those who fall away:

²⁰ If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. ²¹ It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them (2 Peter 2:20-21).

These people were saved. Peter says they had escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But they had lapsed back into the world and were again entangled in it and overcome. What is their condition? They are worse off than they were at the beginning. What was their situation at the beginning? They were bound for hell, as people who didn't know. Now, however, they knew the Lord Jesus, but turned their back on him and went back into the world.

Jesus corroborated Peter's view of varying punishment when he warned,

⁴⁷ "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. ⁴⁸ But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows" (Luke 12:47-48).

Because the people Peter spoke of knew the will of the Lord Jesus but did not do it (stand firm to the end), they will be beaten with many blows. The unbeliever who has never heard will be beaten with few blows. Thus the people of whom Peter spoke were worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.

When Paul spoke to Timothy, his son in the Lord, he talked about people who had fallen away. Paul reminded Timothy why he was giving him further instructions, “so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. *Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith*” (1 Timothy 1:18-19).

When Paul enumerated to Timothy the requirements for overseers, he commanded: “He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and *fall under the same judgment as the devil*” (1 Timothy 3:6). What will be the judgment of the devil? Scripture clearly tells us that he will be thrown into the lake of fire – known to us as hell. This passage states that the person is a recent convert, someone who has entered into a saving relationship with the Lord. But Paul warns about what may happen to him in the future. He may become conceited and be lost! His fate will be the same as the devil. God will have erased his name from the book of life (Revelation 20:15).

Paul then warned Timothy about younger widows:

“As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge. Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to. So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. *Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan*” (1 Timothy 5:11-15).

Paul does not suggest that these young widows were not once true Christians. He speaks of their dedication to Christ. But the desires of the flesh and bad habits can lead to a sinful life. Paul says he knows of instances where *they left their dedication to Christ to follow Satan*.

Obedience

Is it possible that a person when first coming to the Lord will pledge obedience to him, but later cool in his ardor and fall away into disobedience? Of course it is possible unless we all become robots incapable of independent thought and will upon coming to the Lord. We know that is not so. And most of us know many such persons who have fallen away from the faith.

There are many scriptures that speak of the need for obedience to the will of God. Jesus spoke of it at Matthew 7:21:

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

That statement simply and clearly implies that those who do not do the will of God will not enter the kingdom of heaven as only those who do God’s will shall enter that kingdom. Even though a person begins well, he does not do God’s will unless he perseveres in the faith.

Paul warns even more severely:

⁸ He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

It doesn't get much clearer or more forceful than that!

All the Other Conditions Of a Saving Faith

Just as we chose perseverance and obedience, so we could say the same about all those conditions where Jesus said that unless we did that condition, we could not be his disciples. I hope no one will argue that anyone will have salvation who is not a disciple of the Lord Jesus.

Let's look at some examples:

²⁶ "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26).

²⁷ And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27).

³³ In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33).

³ In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3).

²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

We are to love Jesus so much more than those closest to us, even our life, that by contrast it is as though we hate those dearest to us. We are to carry our crosses and follow Jesus, to give up everything, to be born again, and to be righteous from the heart. Unless we do this, we cannot be Jesus' disciple or see or enter the kingdom of heaven.

Each of the above scriptures exclude from salvation those who are not obedient to the requirement of the scripture. Each of those are part of our bargain with God when we receive Jesus as our Lord and pledge obedience to him. We pledge obedience to the teachings and commands of Jesus. We break our part of the bargain when we are disobedient.

When Does God Demand Return Of His Earnest – the Holy Spirit?

As we see from the preceding discussion, when we are disobedient to the teachings and commands of Jesus, we are breaching our part of the bargain with God. Does God instantly demand return of his Holy Spirit and cause us to be damned? Thankfully, that is not the way God reacts. "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

But don't presume upon his patience. In the article "Can Sinning Cost Salvation," there is far more than ample proof that God will damn those who continue in sin. Our duty, when we realize we have sinned (breached our bargain with God) is to repent immediately. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

But remember, we cannot sin with impunity and then confess our sins, believing we can then be forgiven and purified before God. The Apostle John warned, "No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him" (1 John 3:6). If you think you can sin with impunity and be forgiven, you do not live in him nor have you ever seen him or known him.

A more strident warning about future judgment and punishment is given from the writer to the Hebrews:

²⁶ If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, ²⁷ but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God (Hebrews 10:26-27).

The author considers those who deliberately keep on sinning to be enemies of God!

Conclusion

The NIV rendering of "deposit guaranteeing our inheritance" is totally erroneous. The choice of "deposit" to replace "earnest" failed to pass through significant meanings of "earnest". And the words "guaranteeing our inheritance" are nowhere to be found in the original on any of the three texts. They were added gratuitously by the translators. They were in error in doing so. The meanings of "earnest" do not support the use of that phrase.

We have just seen the danger of following translations. I feel particularly sad because I have used the NIV for years as my reading Bible of choice. When I read and write, though, I try to make sure to compare the King James and other versions with the NIV on important passages to be sure there is not a significant difference in meaning. I urge you to do the same!